

Evaluation of impact of shelters on communities in Colombia

Final Report

2026



La Mojana, Colombia, 2025 © Better Shelter

Executive summary

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the impact of shelters on the wellbeing of communities in Colombia. The shelters were provided by the Swedish non-profit foundation Better Shelter, through a donation by **Accenture Foundation**, to Colombian organisation **El Minuto de Dios**.

85 shelter frames (*Structures*) from Better Shelter were channeled to different project locations across Colombia and were used as dignified housing, for earthquake response and for livelihood activities.

The evaluation took place in Colombia in November 2025. A hybrid team, consisting of Better Shelter's impact staff together with an external consultant, conducted the evaluation. A series of interviews, focus group discussions, and observations were made, with almost everyone in the target groups at each project site heard. The findings are therefore considered robust and credible.

The findings reveal enhanced wellbeing for individuals and families across all projects. In La Mojana, a region in north Colombia severely affected by repeated flooding and extreme weather, people in many villages live in substandard conditions. People now living in the erected *Structures* testified to significant improvements in wellbeing and considered it had had a transformative impact on families and children. Their stress levels had lowered, they slept better, children's focus, tranquility and health had improved, and family cohesion was better. It had also contributed to better economic prospects, and practical benefits included better space and dimensions and improved structural safety.

Shelters used for a child-friendly space in La Mojana had contributed to significant changes for the children and the families. The children themselves reported that they were happy and felt belonging at the center; the parents noted that the children's focus and mood levels had improved, and that their school attendance and performance was better. The center was considered to have brought the community together.

In Paratebueno, where the *Structures* were used as emergency shelters for earthquake response, families who stayed in the shelters felt safe, with the knowledge that their shelters stood firmly and well anchored into the ground. This had contributed to reduced stress and improved sleep. Finally, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, the *Structures* enabled livelihood activities for women, contributing to hope, sense of pride, dignity and belonging, and to opportunities to earn and save.

Can these improvements in people's wellbeing be attributed to a specific shelter structure? If so, how has Better Shelter contributed to the changes?

Better Shelter believes that local communities have the best knowledge about materials historically used locally, as well as techniques used for attachment. This localisation approach, in combination with the strong and resilient *Structure* from Better Shelter, resulted in highly relevant housing solutions and thereby wellbeing for the communities in La Mojana. This in turn was a solid foundation for other benefits and changes for families and communities. The local partnerships in combination with the design knowledge of Better Shelter contributed to local solutions that were appropriate and fit for purpose.

For the child-friendly space, other constructions than Better Shelter's Structures could have been used for the same purpose. However, given harsh climate and weather in La Mojana, other structures may not have been as robust and weather-proof for the children. Furthermore, the Structures' modularity (allowing them to be combined to enlarge spaces) contributes to versatility and adaptability for multiple uses and social outcomes.

The evaluation concludes that Better Shelter's product is particularly well suited in earthquake affected areas: *Structures* are firmly anchored into the ground, the material's light weight poses no physical danger. Given the severe stress affected people are under following an earthquake, and during aftershocks, to be able to sleep in a structure that is robust even if the ground trembles is significant to the sense of safety and wellbeing. And to the ability to focus on other aspects of life.

Livelihood activities on the Caribbean coast could have been housed in other structures or solutions. Yet, using the *Structures* in this fashion demonstrates that they can serve different purposes and is a versatile and efficient product. The evaluation also found that the *Structures* lasted well in different climates and environments, without issues of rusting (unlike adjacent materials used).

Lessons learnt from the evaluation include:

- The *Structures* are well adopted to the context and to harsh weather conditions. This is due to the firm design, anchoring, and fit for purpose local solutions.
- Better Shelter's local partnerships are instrumental for the relevance of the shelters. It contributes to community ownership, localisation, capacity building and stimulation of the local economy.
- The steel frame lasts in humid and coastal areas alike, with no negative impact on the metal. It has longevity, therefore cost-efficient over time.
- The shelters are particularly suitable for earthquake affected areas. They stand firm, the materials are benign and lightweight.
- The shelters require no maintenance and no extra repairs or work are needed. Families can focus on other needs.

- The above points make families feel safe, calm and proud. Their sleep improves; the dimension of their space is better. This leads to enhanced wellbeing and satisfaction. Parents feel less stressed and are more present in mind with their children. The children are better off.

In summary, the findings from the evaluation of Better Shelter's collaboration with El Minuto de Dios demonstrate that dignified housing and shelter matter to the wellbeing of people. It provides a foundation for life and contributes directly and indirectly to immediate and longer-term health and social benefits for adults and children alike.

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1. Introduction

Better Shelter is a non-profit foundation that develops and provides safe, dignified shelters for primarily displaced people. In 2022, Better Shelter received a grant from Accenture Foundation to provide vulnerable communities with dignified safe shelter and infrastructure. The grant was awarded to Colombian non-profit Corporación Organización El Minuto de Dios (COMD).

The versatility of Better Shelter's Structure units aligned with COMD's humanitarian responses (displacement of communities affected by floods, earthquakes, other recurrent disasters). This is due to the Structure units being lightweight, durable modular frame, designed to adapt to different materials, needs and budgets.

During 2024 – 2025, COMD channeled 85 *Structures* through different projects across Colombia. These included dignified housing and child-friendly space in La Mojana district that suffered from flooding and inundations, as well as contingency stock for emergencies in Paratebuena earthquake response. It also included livelihood infrastructure: a market garden nursery in the Amazon region and egg and greenhouse business infrastructure on the Caribbean Coast.

To understand the outcomes for the families and communities who now have access to and live in the shelters, Better Shelter conducted an evaluation in November 2025. The evaluation took place in Colombia, through visits to all but one project site under this collaboration.

The focus of the evaluation was on the wellbeing of the families, and what living in the shelters and having access to them for livelihood purposes have meant for their ability to fulfil basic needs and rights. A total of 40 interviews with households, groups or individuals were conducted. 7 focus group discussions were held, and several observations and walk throughs were made. Based on universal sampling, the conclusions from the evaluation are considered robust and valid.

This report presents the findings and conclusions from the evaluation. It has the following structure:

- Chapter 2 presents the background to the collaboration, as well as the geographical and project contexts.
- In chapter 3, the methodology and approach to the evaluation is described, including data collection methods and sampling strategies.
- Chapter 4 contains the findings from the data collection in Colombia.
- Analysis of the findings and an attempt at a counterfactual assessment of the benefits that can be attributed to the shelters are made in chapter 5, as well as a discussion around lessons learned and added value.
- Finally, chapter 6 draws the overall conclusions from the evaluation.

2. Background

2.1 The origins of the collaboration

Better Shelter awarded COMD a grant funded by the Accenture Foundation.



COMD is a Colombian non-profit organisation founded in 1958 that promotes sustainable development of vulnerable communities across Colombia through social housing, education, entrepreneurship, humanitarian assistance and community strengthening programmes.¹

The versatility of Better Shelter's Structure units (as opposed to the Relief Housing Units, RHUs) was aligned with several of COMD's humanitarian responses, such as the displacement of communities affected by floods, earthquakes and other frequent disasters in the country.

The *Structures* were also considered relevant as dignified and durable housing solutions to low-income communities, as well as infrastructure for livelihood and food security initiatives that build community resilience and self-sufficiency for vulnerable groups.

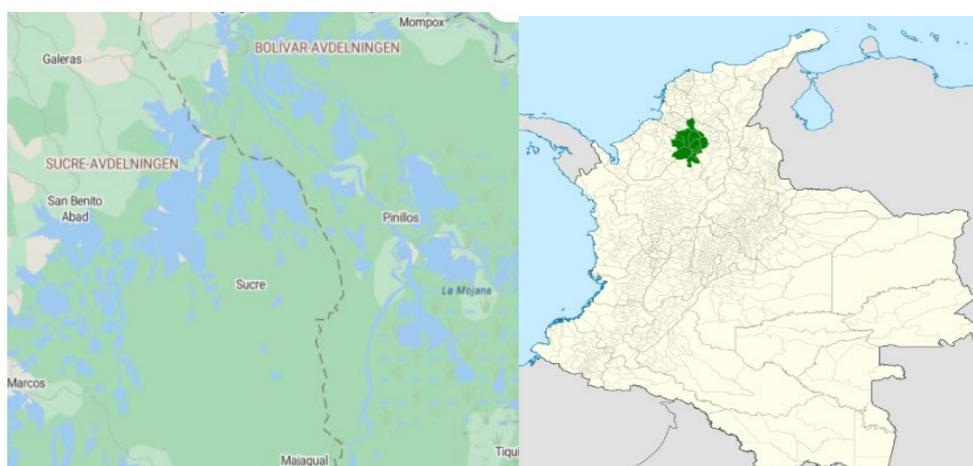
As a result of the donation to COMD, **85 Structures** have been implemented through five initiatives:

- **Dignified housing** in La Mojana, 54 Structures have been erected in two different communities (El Chopá and Valoria)
- **Child-friendly space** in La Mojana: 2 Structures (in El Chopá)
- **Vegetable nursery**, Solano Caquetá, the Amazon region: 6 Structures
- **Infrastructure for poultry-related livelihoods**, Caribbean Coast, 6 Structures
- **Contingency reserve for emergencies**/deployment for earthquake response in Paratebueno, 17 structures
- All but the vegetable nursery in Solano Caquetá have been in scope for this evaluation.

2.2 Areas in scope

Dignified housing in La Mojana

The La Mojana region is one of the most complex water deltas in the world, where three of Colombia's most important rivers intersect. An historic area with sophisticated water infrastructure built by the Zenu 2,000 years ago, today the natural water flows have been disrupted by dykes' construction, which has impacted on the wetlands' ability to manage the flow of water. This has damaged soil fertility while also increased flood risk. The region is seeing more prolonged dry periods and more intense episodes of flooding because of stronger and more unpredictable La Niña and El Niño weather patterns. Since 2010, 86 percent of La Mojana's territory has been permanently under water.



Livelihoods of people in the area have historically been seasonal, reflecting the differing availability of natural resources. But the severe weather and climate changes have significantly affected the communities and their livelihoods, health and economy. The three water inlets keep seven of ten of La Mojana's districts and villages constantly flooded. Over 40 percent of the region's inhabitants – approximately 25,000 people – are affected. Damage to the infrastructure involves the need for reconstruction of roads, dikes, schools, and health centers that are destroyed due to the flood permanence.

La Mojana's inhabitants are considered poorer than the Colombian average (80 percent of the region's population). Almost half have limited access to clean drinking water. Rates of illiteracy are above the national average, in common with other rural areas of, for example, the Caribbean region.

In 2022, COMD initiated humanitarian aid to communities in La Mojana. In November, 12.5 tonnes of aid were delivered, including basic necessities, suitcases and clothing. The same year, the ambitious national fundraising

event Banquete de Millón³ was dedicated to supporting people living in La Mojana.

In August 2021, the collapse of the Cara de Gato levee caused flooding that affected 11 municipalities. Subsequently, during the 2022 rainy season, four additional levee breaches occurred in April and June 2022. These events once again flooded the 11 municipalities and raised flood levels compared to previous events.

The floods lasted for several months and resulted in more than 165,000 affected families, the loss of crops and livestock, and an estimated 33,000 hectares of agricultural land inundated. Families lost their livelihoods, homes were destroyed and/or suffered significant damage. Health risks for families increased due to the lack of water supply, sewage systems, and solid waste collection, with waste being discharged directly into channels and water tributaries. This situation led to an increase in digestive, respiratory, and skin diseases, among others.

When Better Shelter donated **85 Structure units** to COMD, the organisation decided to allocate 54 of them to La Mojana for the humanitarian response. The structures have been erected as dignified housing solutions in two communities, **El Chopá** and **Viloria**.



Photo: A home built with the Better Shelter metal frame and local materials, in Viloria, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025



Photo: Woman outside her new home, built with the Better Shelter metal frame and local materials, in El Chopá, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025



Photo: A home under construction, combining the Better Shelter frame with locally sourced materials, El Chopá, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2024

The process of constructing shelters and families moving into them was divided into multiple periods. It started with Better Shelter providing an on-site training to COMD, their partner local constructor and the community on the assembly of the *Structure* in El Chopá in March 2024.

The community then provided a demonstration and training on how to apply their local material “penca”, strong and fibrous leaves from the fique plant, to clad the walls of the *Structure* according to their traditional building technique.



Photo: community members using “penca” a strong local material attached to the shelter frames, El Chopá, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2024

Better Shelter, COMD and the community then worked together in assembling a full *Structure* clad in *penca* and CGI for the roof.

In March 2025, the same process took place in Vitoria where the community received an onsite training, and another *Structure* was built together between all the partners clad in *penca* and CGI.

Child-friendly space in La Mojana



Photo: Ludoteca, a child-friendly space in La Mojana, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

Upon completing the construction of the *Structures* as dignified housing for the village's families in El Chopá in La Mojana, the community together with COMD decided to dedicate two *Structures* to the development of a child-friendly space for the village's children. COMD works with child-friendly spaces across its projects in Colombia.



Photo: Ludoteca, a child-friendly space in La Mojana, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

Labelled '*Ludoteca*', these spaces are meant to provide a protective environment for children aged 5 to 12, reducing socio-economic and psychosocial risks.

By reducing these exposures, the intention is that the risk of minors participating in illegal activities, becoming involved with illegal groups or having their rights violated is reduced.

Emergency shelters, Paratebueno

On 8 June 2025, a Mw 6.3 earthquake struck the Department of Cundinamarca in Colombia, near the town of Paratebueno, with significant impact on the communities.

In Paratebueno, closest to the epicenter, 134 houses collapsed; damages were registered on further 240 houses, six schools, a church, and a highway.

A landslide occurred and in the village of Santa Cecilia, up to 90 percent of the houses were damaged or destroyed, and a school completely collapsed.

In Medina, at least 45 houses collapsed, 110 others damaged, along with 15 schools and three churches. More than 30 people were injured in Paratebueno and Medina. In November 2025, five months after the disaster, 400 families around the affected area were still without housing.

In response to the earthquake, COMD decided to allocate the **17 Structures** that the organisation had stored as part of its contingency and emergency response preparedness.

COMD collaborated with a local tent manufacturer to design and produce a customised envelope compatible with Better Shelter Structures. The local manufacturer assembled one Structure in their premises to be able to test different configurations, techniques and materials during the design and production process. They also travelled to Paratebueno with COMD to talk to the people affected by the earthquake and understand better their reality and need to design an adequate and effective solution.



*Photo: A temporary shelter provided for the earthquake response in Paratebueno, Colombia.
© Better Shelter, 2025*

The shelters were erected in two different locations around Paratebueno, Santa Cecilia and Medina. Two months after the earthquake, in August 2025, the first Structure equipped with the locally produced tent cover was installed. By October 2025, all 17 Structures covered with the tent covers had been installed and handed over to other affected families, providing them with temporary shelter.

Livelihood activities along the Caribbean coast

While there have been significant urbanisations and socio-economic developments in Colombia's cities and centers, rural areas lag, deepening socio-economic disparities, with a persistent lack of infrastructure and economic opportunity in rural regions. Such is the case on the Caribbean coast, home to 10 million people (a fifth of Colombia's population), but with a third of them living in poverty⁴. While the city of Cartagena and surrounding areas are developing industrially and house many international high-end hotels, along the coast there is significant deprivation. Revenues from larger projects and investments do not trickle down, and income and skill levels are lower on the coast than inland.

Many immigrant communities have settled on the Caribbean coast. It is considered the only tri-racial region, giving it the status of the most diverse and mixed region in the country, as the predominant ethnic group in the region is the Pardo, a mixture of European, mainly Spanish, the indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian.

With immigrant communities typically landless, even though Colombia has in recent years stepped up its land distribution reform, the opportunities for rural coastal communities here to find livelihood activities are slim, and with lower skills levels finding employment opportunities is challenging.

Limited opportunities also means that young people can be prone to get involved in the drug industry or get recruited by armed groups, causing further vulnerabilities to themselves and their families.



Photo: Better Shelter Structures used as a greenhouse on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

COMD supports several initiatives and organisations long the coast. One example is an area called Arroyo Grande and an association of seven women called "El Gavilán", and another area called Palmarito, where a coastal association houses ten families.

COMD donated six *Structures* from Better Shelter to these two communities, to use for poultry and greenhouse/garden livelihood activities for the women and families of the communities.

3. Methodology and approach

3.1 Objective and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was for Better Shelter to gain an understanding of what changes the communities have experienced because of living in and using the shelters. The focus of the evaluation is on **outcomes for communities**, as opposed to outputs from the specific construction of the shelters (e.g., performance and efficiency of shelter construction, etc.).

Given that shelters provide a foundation for families and communities to realise their fundamental rights and in accordance with their individual needs and prerequisites, there are no predetermined outcomes from the projects implemented together with Better Shelter. The basic needs and rights that the families can attain thanks to having a safe and dignified home will depend on individual needs and prerequisites. Therefore, an open-ended evaluation approach and data collection method have been applied.

The methodology used has been inspired by outcome harvesting and contribution analysis. The outcome harvesting approach allowed for an open exploration of changes for communities, while some elements from the comprehensive contribution analysis methodology helped assess how and to what extent shelters have contributed to the changes experienced by the population and the fulfilment of basic rights.

The following key questions have guided the evaluation:

- What changes have contributed to this accommodation in terms of your wellbeing?
- What has the accommodation contributed to your physical and psychosocial health?
- How has it contributed in terms of livelihood activities?
- How has it contributed to your children (safety/learning environment/concentration/sleep/belonging)?
- How does this compare to other types of accommodation you have lived in (counterfactual question)?

3.2 Data collection methods and sampling

The main data collection methods have consisted of interviews, focus group discussions and observations. A total of 40 interviews with households, groups or individuals were conducted. Seven focus group discussions were held, and several observations and walk throughs were made.

For most projects evaluated, universal sampling was made. This has meant that the findings and themes surfaced are considered robust and credible, as almost everyone has been heard, and all views and experiences are represented in the data collection. For the Ludoteca, the child-friendly space in La Mojana, most children present at the Ludoteca the day of interviews participated in the data collection, and about 30 percent of the parents present were interviewed.

3.3 Limitations and bias

The main limitation of the evaluation stems from the hybrid internal-external evaluation approach. Better Shelter's internal impact staff have been responsible for conducting the evaluation, but in partnership with an external Colombian consultant. A fully external evaluation runs less risk of bias; a completely internal evaluation can be prone to bias. On the other hand, it is often more attuned to the nuances of the programme and historical contexts and programmatic changes. By using a hybrid internal-external approach, the deeper understanding of the programme context, history and relationships are kept, while at the same time managing some bias risks that are present in a fully internal evaluation.

Limitations in terms of sampling are considered minimal, given the almost universal sampling.

Assessments and attribution of outcomes to the specific shelter solution provided by Better Shelter ideally need a counterfactual assessment, to understand what changes for people relate to Better Shelter's Structures and what changes would have been likely to happen with any type of new shelter solution or housing. This has been considered to the extent possible. In interviews and in focus group discussions, questions were for example asked what changes had to do with the specific construction. This is discussed in the analysis section, section 5.

4. Findings from the data collection

4.1 Findings La Mojana

As described in chapter 2, 54 of the 85 *Structures* donated by Better Shelter were used by COMD’s shelter and housing response to two communities in La Mojana following flood damages in 2022. The process of constructing the shelters and the families moving into them was divided into multiple periods. In El Chopá, the first *Structure* was built in March 2024 and the last in June 2025. In Viloría, the first *Structure* was built in March 2025, and the last in July 2025. Families moved in in March 2024 (El Chopá) and March 2025 (Viloría). In addition to the housing solution, a child-friendly space in El Chopá was constructed in September 2025.

This section sets out the data collected from El Chopá and Viloría regarding the wellbeing of the families now living in the Structures.

Dignified housing in La Mojana

The evaluation team collected data from the following sources in La Mojana:

Viloría	El Chopá
4 focus group discussions	2 focus group discussions
3 household interviews	4 household interviews
6 walk-through observations	8 walk-through observations

All households that had received a new shelter from Better Shelter were consulted in the data collection, either through participation in the focus group discussions, or through household interviews.

The focus groups

The focus groups were single sex, with women and men conducting separate discussions. Five key questions were discussed:

1. Well-being and daily life
2. Physical and Psychosocial Health
3. Impact on children
4. Livelihoods and Economic Activities
5. Comparison with Previous Housing

Both locations – Viloría and El Chopá - reported substantial improvements in well-being, health, and livelihoods after moving into the new houses.

Across all groups, the participants emphasised **increased security and safety**. They now feel safer and more secure in the new homes, with less fear of weather, pests, or structural collapse. The participants confirmed **better physical and psychosocial health**. They have experienced a reduction in illnesses (especially illnesses related to cold and dampness), less stress, and improved sleep. In both Viloría and El Chopá, the communities noted a positive impact on mental health and family relationships. The sense of ownership and pride in their homes was strong, and there was a reduction in family conflicts.

In both communities, there was a notable **positive impact on children**. The children benefited from better sleep, improved concentration, and school performance. According to adults/parents, the children had a stronger sense of belonging and pride. The availability of more space was highlighted as a major improvement – for recreation, better rest, and better areas for study and focus. Parents were more present and communicative with their children.

In terms of **economic and livelihood benefits**, the new houses allowed families to save money, invest in other needs, and engage in more productive or entrepreneurial activities. They experienced greater economic stability and independence. There were more energy and motivation for work, and some families used their homes for entrepreneurial activities. The division of space also enabled better organisation of family and potential entrepreneurial activities.

In both locations, the groups described the new houses as **more durable, resistant**, and of **higher quality** compared to previous homes. Participants described the new houses as more spacious, fresher, and structurally superior (the metal structure compared to wood or plastic). The homes were more resilient to climate challenges, provided better ventilation, and required fewer repairs. The sense of pride and ownership was a recurring theme.

Interviews

Three of four households in Chopá had previously lived in precarious housing, with leaks and faulty roofs and walls. The fourth household did not have a home at all prior to receiving shelter from COMD and had stayed temporarily with friends and family, being constantly on the move. The families that had had housing were continuously preoccupied with repairs, adjusting to rain penetrating the house daily, or the whole house or refuge being significantly affected by harsh wind and rain.

There was strong convergence on key changes with the new housing across all households. All noted that the new housing had meant significant emotional changes for the families. These included:

- A sense of protection, less trouble
- Reduced stress, more peace and tranquility
- Improved mood levels
- Improved wellbeing overall

The findings mirror those from the focus groups.

Key **emotional and wellbeing changes** included a sense of stability and safety, reduced stress, and a sense of tranquility. They testified to better family relationships and communication, as well as a positive outlook on the future. They described a “*radical transformation of life quality*”. The interviewees also testified to **improved physical health**. They enjoyed sleeping better and were less sick. The respiratory issues for one girl had been significantly reduced.

In terms of how the **physical structure had contributed to these changes**, all households concluded that they felt safe and healthy as the structure was robust and the roof leakproof. They were no longer permanently wet and humid. The strong and firm structure, the roof by local material, and weatherproof cladding on top of the firm structure that keeps rain and humidity out, and finally the local material for the door, that could be locked, meant that the doors could be locked, as a result families felt safe. Practical benefits included better space for sleep, and for separate sleeping areas, better distribution of the square meters and good height of the space, improved thermal comfort and protection against the weather elements – rain and humidity and storms.

Several interviewees used the term “dignity” and hope when describing their new situation and life.

Differences between Viloría and El Chopá

The core findings between Viloría and El Chopá are similar, however, in El Chopá there was a stronger emphasis on *community and social cohesion*. Collective emotions, community participation, and social bonds, especially among women, were highlighted. The new houses appear to have fostered deeper social connections and collective well-being. In terms of *time reallocation*, participants in El Chopá specifically mentioned that less time spent on repairs allowed for more time on productive or creative activities.

Gender differences

Both women and men recognised the positive impact of the new housing on health, well-being, and livelihoods, but based on the findings from the focus groups, their perspectives reflected different priorities and experiences, potentially shaped by gender roles and responsibilities. Women tended to emphasise emotional well-being, community bonds, empowerment, and the impact on children’s motivation and learning. They also highlighted increased opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic independence. Men focused more on physical security, stability, practical benefits, and improvements in family dynamics and economic productivity. They discussed planning for the future and the sense of ownership and pride in their homes.

Ludoteca – Child-friendly space

In consultation with COMD, the community in El Chopá decided to allocate two remaining *Structures* from Better Shelter to a place for the children, a Ludoteca. It was erected in September 2025 and consists of two Structures put together. A few organisations have made donations and provided different equipment, learning material and toys for the children to use. Children of ages 1,5 – 18 years of age attend the Ludoteca, on alternate days depending on the age group. The focus is on structural play and individual learning. On Fridays the space is available to parents, for their learning and development.



Photo: Ludoteca, a child-friendly space in La Mojana, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

To understand the changes and benefits of the Ludoteca, the evaluation team conducted **13 structural interviews with children**, and **3 semi-structural interviews with adults**. In addition, **observation** of the child-friendly space was done. The children present that had parental consent to participate were individually asked six different questions with answers on a scale of 5 and with a corresponding smiley face.

From observation, the space was very calm and there was a positive ambiance. Several parents were present the day the evaluation team visited. The qualified pre-school teacher appeared engaged and focused and appeared to have the children's and the parents' trust. A variety of tools and activities were available: dance (educational), reading, maths/numbers, computers, Lego, soft toys, building blocks, dolls, art supplies. The house (Better Shelter's structure with local cladding/wood) was observed to be stable, with fresh air coming through although it was very warm outside. It was a good space in terms of dimensions, with the two *Structures* put together and with concrete floors.

According to the children's own voices and from the interviews with them, they always or most of the time...

- feel good about being at the center, find things to do and peers to play with
- feel loved and wanted by adults and other children at the center
- have been able to find peace and tranquility at the center

According to the parents interviewed, the key benefits of the Ludoteca were that it is an educational reinforcement that provides personal learning strategies. It is considered a safe learning environment and a safe space for children, an alternative to street activities. It gives them access to new technologies (computers), and it has more toys and recreational spaces than at home. It gives the children opportunities to develop their artistic skills.

In terms of how the benefits of the center have impacted the children, adults considered that the children are more social and have developed improved social and collaborative skills. Their energy levels and moods have improved. They were considered to have enhanced motivation (to attend school, to learn, to study) and the parents thought this had contributed to improved school performance.

'Many houses don't have televisions and things like that. So, I get them excited about computers here. Their mentality has changed. It's no longer "I don't want to be a fisherman", but one told me he wanted to be an architect, another told me she wanted to be a doctor, and that's how it has impacted them.'

Pre-school teacher in charge of the Ludoteca

'He used to be like a very quiet child, always still, but since he has started to come here, his emotions and energy have been awakened.' ... 'he says it like this, the colours in English, the numbers. And it gives him a boost after what they give him here.'

Parent

The Ludoteca was also considered to have led to reduced stress for families and households. It was supporting parents' emotional wellbeing and offering new learning opportunities for parents (basic literacy and entrepreneurship skills). The parents considered that the Ludoteca had played a transformative role in the community.

From all data collected related to the Ludoteca, it is evident that it contributes to a significant change in the community and to high levels of satisfaction and wellbeing for the children. As a result, it does so for the parents as well.

4.2 Findings emergency shelters Paratebueno



Photo: A family in Santa Cecilia in front of their temporary shelter provided for the earthquake response in Paratebueno, Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

17 Structures from Better Shelter had been erected in sites affected by the June 8 (2025) earthquake. The shelters consisted of Better Shelter’s Structure units, with a tent cover designed and developed by a local tent cover producer, engaged by COMD.

The assessment in Paratebueno focused on **immediate and short-term changes** in wellbeing experienced by families living in shelters. The evaluation team conducted interviews and observations in the two sites where Better Shelter’s structures have been erected:

- Santa Cecilia & Japón, where families have lived in the shelters for 2 months.
- Santa Teresa, where the shelters were put up the day before the evaluation visit, and families had just spent their first night in them.

10 families were interviewed. Walk throughs and observations were conducted in the shelters of the same families.

Santa Cecilia and Japon – families in shelters for two months

The families in Santa Cecilia and Japon had initially relocated to community spaces such as temporary tents, communal shelters, and sports centers. Challenges of the temporary locations were considered overcrowded spaces, lack of privacy, uncomfortable living conditions, difficulty sleeping, and constant stress and anxiety.

The families interviewed that were now in a shelter from Better Shelter/COMD and considered that this had stabilised their situation relatively significantly. Key themes that emerged from the interviews were:

- The shelters are stable, wind and aftershock resistant
- The families have a sense of safety, as a result
- There is less stress overall, and reduced post-traumatic stress
- There is a sense of tranquility
- It is now possible to think of other things, including income-generating activities and going back to work

The observations and comments from individuals revealed that the inside air temperature of the few RHU:s put up was quite high. The shelters with the Swedish metal frame together with the locally sourced tent cover were hot as well, on account of hot weather, but better inside temperature than the RHU:s.

Santa Teresa – families after first night in shelter

Santa Teresa is about 20 kilometers outside of Paratebueno and was on the earthquake's fault line. The families in this village had similar experiences as to the families in Santa Cecilia and Japon, but with less infrastructure given it is a very remote village. They had to be in makeshift accommodation, or sometimes no accommodation, for longer.

The evaluation team arrived just the morning after five families had spent their first night in the shelters. The focus was therefore on the immediate experience and wellbeing of the individuals consulted.

"How was your first night in your new shelter/house?"

This was the first question asked in the interviews. A few representative quotes include:

'Now I can sleep peacefully, without worrying about rain or the house collapsing.'

'We feel more secure. The structure is strong, resistant to strong winds'

All households spoke of reduced stress and less fright in the new shelter. Much like in Santa Cecilia and Japón, the families felt a sense of safety on account of the stable structure. All interviewed had slept well, which was a change, and the children were well rested and content.

The families were generally using the shelters to sleep in and used what was left of their original houses for cooking and to perform other daily activities.

4.3 Findings Egg and greenhouse business infrastructure Cartagena



Photo: Better Shelter Structures used as a greenhouse and henhouse on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

On the Caribbean coast, west of Cartagena to the north, two projects supported by COMD were assessed for outcomes. One was in an area called Arroyo Grande and an association of 7 women called "El Gavilan". The other site was in Palmarito, where a coastal association called ASOPALPEZ (farmers' and fishermen's association), or Consejo Comunitario de la Comunidad Negra de Palmarito houses 10 families.

In both locations, El Minuto de Dios donated shelter structures to the associations for the purpose of livelihood activities, such as poultry and greenhouse/market gardens.

Arroyo Grande – El Gavilán



Photo: Better Shelter Structures used as a henhouse on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. © Better Shelter, 2025

In Arroyo Grande, two adjoining Better Shelter structures were used as hen houses. This has meant that the women have been able to initiate activities to livelihood purposes, for own consumption and for vending to generate income.

The main source of data collection in Arroyo Grande consisted of a **focus group** that explored the most significant changes for the women associates. The discussion centered around the following questions:

- What has the *Structures* meant for you? What have you been able to do thanks to the Structures?
- How does it make you feel to be able to conduct the livelihood activities in the Structures?
- Consequently, are there other opportunities or competencies that you have developed here that you may be able to use in another context in the future?
- Which are the most significant changes for you?

Themes such as hope, belonging, and empowerment were raised. The use of the *Structures* for the livelihood project had contributed to occupation and livelihood and focus for the women associates. The most significant changes were:

Concrete and practical changes

- Food security: more production, food production guaranteed
- Interacting – advocacy, interacting with state entities, neighbors and other community groups

Well-being

- Feeling more secure due to teamwork
- Increased self-confidence
- Feeling loved and supported
- More proud, empowered and motivated
- Feeling more useful
- Less stressed

It was clear to the evaluators that the projects had quite drastically positively changed the life and meaningfulness of and for the women.

Palmarito - Consejo Comunitario de la Comunidad Negra de Palmarito

In Palmarito, the association Consejo Comunitario de la Comunidad Negra de Palmarito received a donation from COMD of four shelters had recently been put up to house poultry and a market garden.

Six individual interviews were held as well as **one group interview** with four women. In addition, observations and walk-through the hen house and the greenhouse was made. The questions asked were open-ended, to distil key changes to the wellbeing and livelihoods for the associates. The key changes were triangulated through all the interviews.

In terms of **impact on livelihood** from the activities that are carried out in the shelters, the activities lead to improved food self-sufficiency. It has also led to supplementary earnings from sales, and as a result possibilities for savings.

The interviewees testified to **enhanced community and social benefits**. They now experience stronger community bonds and relationships, and they mutually support one another. They have developed their abilities to work in teams; they exchange knowledge regarding the cultivations and poultry business. The sale of eggs at a more affordable price to the wider local community in the area is of course also better for the residents, who now have egg suppliers closer to home.

The changes in **psychosocial wellbeing** were very clear. The women describe how they now have a sense of purpose and experience reduced stress. They have a mental focus and occupation. This has distracted them from family conflicts at home and contributed to more satisfied home environment for several of the women. They have learnt new skills and increased self-esteem. A few describe that they have renewed hope.

In conclusion, the shelters had contributed to a life changing situation for the women in both project sites on the Caribbean coast. The purpose that the shelters were used for meant that the women now had a purpose, a collective responsibility and an opportunity to grow and learn new things. It also meant that they had better food security as well as they to some extent could earn some money on what they produced and sold. Other structures could be used as hen house or market gardening purposes, but it does not take away the fact that in this case Better Shelters' *Structures* were indeed used, and that they worked very well for this purpose. The *Structures* had withstood the strong winds and salt water by the coast, as well as they kept wild animals from digging into the hen house at Palmarito.

5. Analysis

5.1 Overall analysis

In La Mojana, the findings from Viloría and El Chopá indicate communities experiencing significant improvements in well-being, health, and livelihoods due to the new housing. Data collection from both sites reinforces the transformative impact of improved housing, but with some nuances reflecting local priorities and experiences. In El Chopá the community highlighted cohesion and immediate practical benefits, while Viloría focuses more on family structure, space, and economic independence.

The impact on the community and the children from the Ludoteca, the child-friendly space, was very clear even though the center had only been up and running for about two months when the evaluation visit took place.

In Paratebueno, where the *Structures* were used as emergency shelters following the June 8 earthquake, families who now stayed in the shelters felt safe, with the knowledge that their shelters stood firmly and well anchored into the ground. This appears to have contributed to less stress and better sleep.

On the Caribbean coast, the *Structures* enabled livelihood activities for women, contributing to hope, sense of pride, dignity and belonging, to opportunities to earn and save, and to overall wellbeing.

But to what extent can these changes be attributed to Better Shelter's *Structures per se*?

5.2 Counterfactual assessment

Housing in La Mojana

The structure of the houses/shelters in La Mojana consisted of a combination of Better Shelter's steel structure and locally sourced roof and door. On top of that was local cladding (wood/clay) for the walls.

Many individuals consulted in the evaluation highlighted that the roof kept them dry, and that the locked door provided safety, given the harsh weather conditions. However, the roof and the door without stable metal structure would not have provided the same quality and stability.

The partnership between COMD and Better Shelter also enabled a design of locally sourced roof and door, and that aligned with the design and technical solutions of the frame. COMD asked the communities which materials they would

like to use for cladding walls and roofs, and the communities made the final decision on what to use. Once the decision was made, Better Shelter, COMD and the communities worked together on how to attach the materials to the *Structure* in the most efficient and economically conducive way.

Thus, based on Better Shelter's belief that local communities have the best knowledge about materials historically used locally, and the techniques used to attach materials, in combination with the strong and resilient *Structure* from Better Shelter together resulted in very relevant housing solutions and thereby wellbeing for the communities in La Mojana.

It is fair to conclude that Better Shelter's *Structure*, together with the locally identified materials and solutions, provides a solid foundation for the other benefits and changes for families and communities.

The partnership and design knowledge of Better Shelter contribute to local solutions that are appropriate, precise, and fit for purpose.

Ludoteca in Chopá (child-friendly space)

This evaluation has demonstrated that the child-friendly space enables children's subjective wellbeing, with a positive impact on the children's learning and studies (including motivation, focus, and energy levels). Furthermore, the center has an impact on wider families, with reduced stress, support for parents' emotional wellbeing, and new learning opportunities for parents.

Without Better Shelter's *Structures* to house the educational activities and the safe space, the activities would not have been taken place. The two shelter *Structures* available triggered COMD's and the community's idea to establish a Ludoteca. While other structures could have been used for the same purpose, given harsh climate and weather conditions in El Chopá, another structure may not have been equally robust and weather-proof for the children. The modular nature of the *Structures*, which allows them to be combined to enlarge spaces, is also considered by this evaluation to contribute to versatility and adaptability for multiple uses and social outcomes.

Paratebueno

This evaluation has demonstrated that Better Shelter's product is particularly well suited in earthquake affected areas. This is for two reasons: the *Structures* are firmly anchored into the ground, and the light weight of the material pose no physical danger in the unlikely event that the shelter would collapse or fall apart.

It is natural for people who have experienced strong earthquakes to experience post-traumatic stress and have an underlying fear that more shocks may come. To be able to sleep in a structure that is benign and that will protect you well even if the ground trembles, is significant to the sense of safety and

wellbeing. Given that aftershocks can linger for several months after an earthquake, to be able to stay in a safe and robust shelter for that period appears to be of large benefit to individuals' wellbeing and to the ability to focus on other aspects of life.

Caribbean coast

While the livelihood activities on the Caribbean coast – market garden and poultry – could have been housed in other structures or solutions, the fact that Better Shelter's *Structures* were used for this purpose demonstrate the shelter can serve different purposes and is a versatile and thereby efficient product. The livelihood activities could have been housed in other products, but Better Shelter's *Structure* lasts well in different air and climates, and on the Caribbean coast, an adjoining poultry netting had started to rust whereas the *Structure's* steel had not. The product has longevity and is therefore also a financially sustainable choice for other purposes than dignified housing and temporary homes.

5.3 Lessons learnt

There are several lessons learnt from this evaluation:

- The firm design, installation, anchoring, and fit for purpose local solutions make the shelters relevant and well adopted to the context and harsh weather conditions, in a place like La Mojana.
- The local partnerships with COMD and communities have been instrumental for the relevance of the shelters. It has contributed to ownership, localisation, capacity building and contribution to the local economy as materials are sourced in-country.
- The shelters are particularly suitable in earthquake affected areas. They stand firm, the materials are benign and lightweight.
- The above points make families feel safe, calm and proud. Their sleep can improve; they have better space – height and width wise.
- The shelters require no maintenance and stay firm; no extra repairs or work are needed. The families can focus on other things and have other needs met.
- This leads to enhanced wellbeing and satisfaction. Parents feel less stressed and are more present in mind with their children. The children are better off.

- The steel frame has lasted in humid areas as well as coastal areas where saltwater evaporation has not led to any impact on the metal (compared with other metals that were next to it), making it last long.

5.4 Added value

Based on the analysis in the section above, a few aspects emerge as specific added value of Better Shelter's product and approach, for the wellbeing of people.

The **high-strength steel** of the *Structure* means that it is very robust and can withstand harsh weather conditions, including strong winds and aftershocks from an earthquake. The steel also proved to be resistant to saltwater that can cause rusting and other damages to material. The robustness of the material also means it lasts longer, contributing to a cost-effective investment.

Specificities of **the design** are considered unique and conducive to wellbeing. The firm and deep **anchoring** of the shelter, in combination with the **cross wiring** with steel wires, leads to a firm and solid *Structure* that stands deeply rooted and fixed. The **dimensions** of the *Structure*, being just over 17 m² in surface and a generous floor-to-ceiling height, means that it resembles the dimensions of a house, leading to physical relaxation and wellbeing.

The *Structure* is **adaptable to different contexts, climates and needs**. The frame can be combined with the best locally suited cladding and roofing according to partners' local knowledge, and that together with Better Shelter's technical expertise can be designed to a shelter/house that is adapted to the local weather conditions. It can also be adapted to other uses, through its modularity. This includes social infrastructure (such as for the child-friendly space) by combining two or more *Structures*, or to livelihood activities. This means that the product can serve several needs.

Better Shelter's **approach to how it works with local partners** also contributes to added value. The partnership with local organisations, and the reliance of the knowledge and experience of those partners and the local communities regarding local materials and techniques contribute to relevant and sustainable outcomes.

6. Conclusions

The evaluation of the Better Shelter's and COMD's collaboration to provide shelter structures in Colombia concludes that it has led to significant changes for the wellbeing of individuals and families who have access to and live in the shelters. While the projects evaluated differed in nature and context, the shelters from all the projects contributed to a life foundation based on which other needs and basic rights could be met.

People in the two villages in flood affected La Mojana experienced an increased sense of security and safety, with less fear of weather and structural collapse. Their physical and psychosocial health had improved, with a reduction in illnesses, less stress, and improved sleep. Their mental health was better, as were family relationships.

Children benefited from better sleep with improved concentration and school performance. There were economic and livelihood benefits, as the new housing allowed families to save money, and engage more in productive or entrepreneurial activities.

The homes were more resilient to climate challenges, provided better ventilation, and required no repairs. The child-friendly space had a significant positive impact on the children, with improved social and collaborative skills, and their energy and moods have improved.

Families living in the shelters in earthquake affected Paratebueno thought that they now had a more stable situation. The shelters were experienced to be **stable, wind and aftershock resistant**; the families had a **sense of safety**, as a result. There was less stress overall, and they were now better able to focus on other things, such as work and income generating activities.

For the livelihood projects on the Caribbean coast, the women considered that the shelters had contributed to a life changing situation. They now had a purpose and opportunities to learn new things. They had improved food security and could earn some money. The Structures had withstood the strong winds and salt water by the coast, and they kept wild animals from digging into the hen house at Palmarito.

The evaluation concludes that while some of the changes in wellbeing for the people are indirect, a robust and dignified shelter/house is one key contributor to those changes, and to the realisation of basic rights. Without a proper space to call home, it is not possible to sleep well, to rest well and to focus and study. This evaluation has also provided examples that the specific *Structure* from Better Shelter, and Better Shelter's approach to local partnership and co-design, together make for locally adjusted shelter solutions, that are fit for purpose for

the specific context and that contribute to the local economy. And that the benefits and changes uncovered by this evaluation can be attributed to the specific partnership and products by Better Shelter and COMD.